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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0265
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BELGRADE 000435

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SERBIA WEEKLY UPDATE (3/26 - 3/30)

Classified By: Ambassador Michael C. Polt for reasons 1.4b and d

11. (U) This cable summarizes notable events relating to Serbia and Kosovo.

12. (C) Summary: For the week of March 26, the announcement and international reactions to Ahtisaari's recommendation for the supervised independence of Kosovo were the dominant events of the week related to Kosovo and Serbia. PM Kostunica's office has confirmed that he will attend the UNSC meeting on April 3. The Embassy followed U/S Burns' announcement USG support for the proposal with a vigorous public diplomacy effort led by the Ambassador. Kostunica's response was immediate and rejectionist as expected but there are signs that his strategy could be backfiring. A joint TV interview with the Ambassador and his British counterpart receive widespread attention and comment. Finally, a visiting senior Slovak official assured the Ambassador of his country's support in the UNSC. End Summary.

SERBIA REACTS TO AHTISAARI AND HIS SUPPORTERS

13. (U) Serbian leaders, though not its public, reacted quickly and loudly to Ahtisaari's recommendation for supervised independence, and to USG, NATO, and EU support for it. Local media erroneously reported that both Tadic and Kostunica called U/S Burns on Monday regarding the Ahtisaari plan rather than the reverse.

14. (U) Kostunica said the failure of Ahtisaari's plan is "Serbia's highest national interest" and said UNOSCE talks had been a "badly directed show." Kostunica was quick to raise again the prospect of a Russian veto, saying it would be "of historic significance to Serbia." Kostunica will attend the April 3 UNSC meeting. Tadic reiterated the Serbian Government line that independence is unacceptable and that more negotiations are needed. Minister of Local Governance (and DSS member) Zoran Loncar told the press that he expects new talks led by a new negotiator "when the UN Security Council rejects the proposal." Serbian officials also addressed new round of diplomatic efforts aimed at the UNSC non-permanent members.

15. (U) Serbian Coordinating Center for Kosovo director Sanda Raskovic-Ivic told B92 that for the first time the USG has endorsed a violation of international law by supporting the

plan. She added that Russia is not alone in calling for the resumption of talks and claims China, Peru, South Africa, Indonesia, Ghana and Slovakia will soon voice their support for Serbia's position.

¶16. (U) Outgoing FM Draskovic said he would dispatch outgoing Minister for Minorities and Human Rights (and Bosniak) Rasim Ljajic to lobby Islamic countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Qatar and Kuwait. Draskovic also said he would send assistant FM Bogojevic to South Africa, Congo and Ghana.

¶17. (U) On the European Parliament's resolution supporting Ahtisaari's plan Interior Minister and DSS deputy leader Jovic said the EU was in favor of "seizing 15% of its territory...in the name of friendship."

¶18. (U) SRS Leader Nikolic said yesterday that everything that concerns the Kosovo final status lies in Russia's hands. Nikolic said that he would be so surprised if Russia does not veto that "my world would collapse and I would retire from public life."

KOSTUNICA'S POLICY BACKFIRING?

¶19. (SBU) We have noticed some negative articles about Kostunica's Kosovo policy this week from unexpected sources, possibly indicating that his rejectionist policy might be backfiring. Pro-Radical tabloid Kurir often targets democratic parties for negative coverage, particularly the LDP and DS. However, the 3/29 edition ran a sarcastic article calling Kostunica the "New Sloba" (Milosevic's nickname) and criticizing his assertion that the failure of

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the Ahtisaari plan is Serbia's national interest. The article quoted a Serbian analyst as saying that "Serbia has always been counterproductive when it uses heavy artillery in diplomatic negotiations." The same day, pro-West daily Blic ran a sly cartoon lampooning Kostunica's reputation for avoiding questions by claiming he was not informed about an issue. The cartoon shows Kostunica at the press room podium saying, "I was not informed that Kosovo would be independent" while his press secretary tells an advisor, "We prepare him for every possibility." B92's English language website has an active online community of local Serbian, Albanian and international bloggers who comment on articles. A short article on Kostunica's comment that a Russian veto would have "the deepest sense of historic importance for Serbia and the Serbian nation" sparked several unusual anti-Kostunica comments from ostensibly Serbian bloggers in particular. One post said "Kostunica has repeatedly said Kosovo will never get independence, but (neither) he nor anyone else in government has offered any idea for what to do with the Albanians living there."

AMBASSADOR'S MEDIA CAMPAIGN

¶10. (U) After the Ahtisaari plan and the USG support for it were announced, post immediately arranged three joint interviews this week for the Ambassador and his British counterpart, Stephen Wordsworth. The joint interviews with national broadcaster RTS, wire service FoNet and Belgrade daily Blic left no doubt that the USG and EU are firmly behind the Ahtisaari plan and the UN process. Several other TV stations and dailies also reported on the interviews, highlighting that the two Ambassadors made clear that Ahtisaari's proposal for supervised independence in Kosovo is the only possible solution, and that further talks should not be expected. Blic (circ. 200,000) gave the front page to the interview, with the headline "No New Negotiations on Kosovo." National broadcaster RTS aired the dynamic and direct interview on the show "Oko" ("Eye," approx. 2 million viewers). The host Zoran Stanojevic asked tough, opinionated

questions and frequently cited the GOS position favoring autonomy within Serbia. When asked why the international community is "punishing Serbia," the Ambassadors stuck to the same message: we understand this is difficult, the Ahtisaari proposal protects the rights of the Serbs and other minorities, and that UNSCR 1244 specifically calls for a decision on status by the UN. The interviews reached a huge portion of the public in Belgrade and around Serbia, and the excerpts of the interviews that were printed in other Belgrade print media and news agencies.

¶11. (U) Dragoljub Zarkovic, editor of the moderate weekly Vreme, dedicated his weekly newspaper column in the pro-government Politika to the "diplomatic-media offensive" of the "Atlantic Duo" of the U.S. and UK Ambassadors, praising them for delivering to the people a clear message that the Serbian government "will not and/or cannot" deliver on Kosovo. Calling the Ambassadors "two black ravens," (an allusion to a well-known Serbian myth in which two birds flew over the Serb army at Kosovo Polje, auguring the Serbs' 1389 defeat by the Turks), Zarkovic criticizes Kostunica for saying that Serbia's national goal is to see Ahtisaari fail. He writes, "I'd rather see that our national interest is the success of one of our own plans, but the problem with this is that we have no good plan for Kosovo."

DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY

¶12. (C) Slovakia: Slovak MFA political director Miroslav Lajcak (strictly protect throughout) visited Belgrade on 3/30 and met with the Ambassador. Lajcak downplayed his country's discussions on Kosovo as a "matter of domestic politics" and assured that Slovakia will "vote with its allies in the UNSC" and will "work to maintain EU unity" on the issue. Public support for the Ahtisaari plan, however, would "kill the Slovak government" and Lajcak already expects a vote of no-confidence after the UNSC vote. Lajcak added that Slovak FM Kubris had said this to both Kostunica and Tadic when he came to Belgrade, and that he would reiterate the same message.

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¶13. (C) Lajcak also provided readouts of his recent meetings with Russian and EU officials. Of his recent meeting in Moscow with Deputy FM Titov, Lajcak said he expected no change in the Russian position who are "happy to hold the key" on Kosovo. Lajcak also met with German FM Steinmeier earlier this week who agreed firmly on Kosovo independence; Lajcak paraphrased Steinmeier as saying there is no "plan B" and the issue must be resolved as "the future of Serbia is at stake."

¶14. (C) On Serbian domestic politics, Lajcak said he considers Kostunica "hopeless" and still worries that the DSS may enter into an agreement with the Radicals. The hope, therefore, is that Tadic will emerge in a Government and able to take credit for the resumption of SAA talks, which Lajcak is assured "without dilemma" in the EU. According to Lajcak, EU Enlargement Commissioner Rehn is both willing and vested with the power to restart talks as soon as the Serbian Government is formed and the GOS issues a statement affirming commitment to the conditions of accession.

¶15. (U) Ghana: The Ghanan Ambassador to Serbia gave an interview to Glas Javnosti in which he repeatedly stated that his country would "uphold the UN Charter" in the UNSC and that Ghana "supports territorial integrity."

¶16. (U) Russia: RTS reported that Putin told the President that Russia opposes an imposed solution for Kosovo and urges a solution acceptable to Belgrade and Pristina. Serbian media also reported Russian FM Lavrov comments that it is too early to speculate on the voting of the Kosovo resolution

status. He said that Russia will not be simply an "observer" in the UNSC. Also, Politika ran a front page article on March 30 noting wire reports that Putin may travel to Serbia in June. TANJUG wire service quoted "Croatian media" claiming Putin is considering the trip but BETA noted they were not able to confirm the report.
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